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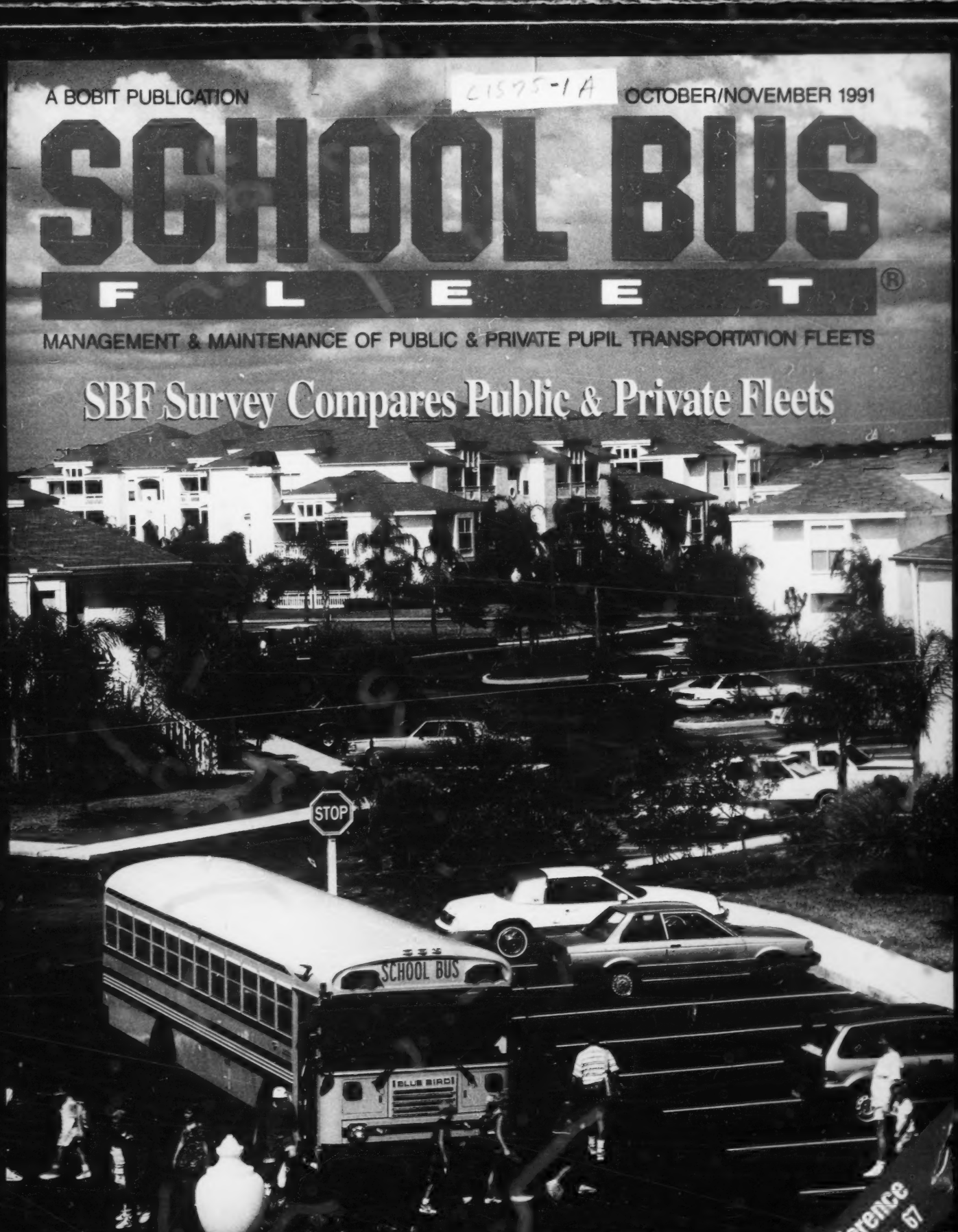
OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1991

# SCHOOL BUS FLEET®

MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC & PRIVATE PUPIL TRANSPORTATION FLEETS

## SBF Survey Compares Public & Private Fleets




School Bus Braking Basics

Wheelchair Restraint Tips

NAPT Conference
Schedule Inside - Pg. 67

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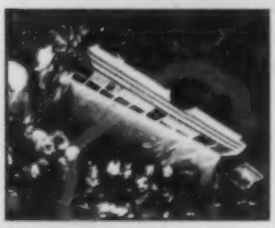
# SCHOOL BUS FLEET®

MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC & PRIVATE PUPIL TRANSPORTATION FLEETS

Vol. 37 No. 6



**Bus crash raises questions about bus design....24**

**How tie-downs and restraints work.....58**

**Seat belt issue still controversial.....71**

*On the cover: Blue Bird TC/2000 at Providence Place, Tampa, Fla. Photo by Erwin Harrison.*

## OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 1991

# Features

**20** **Survey Compares District, Contractor Fleets**
*School districts' annual bus maintenance averages $3,075 per vehicle. The average contractor plans to purchase five buses and sell two this year.*

**24** **Faulty Brakes and Driver Blamed in Fatal Crash**
*Investigators simulate accident. Victims file lawsuits against bus contractor and bus manufacturer.*

**35** **Mayflower Helped Victims, Families, Workers After Crash**
*President Michael Smith let his conscience be his guide. Palm Springs accident hasn't shaken his faith in the company.*

**38** **Four for the Price of One**
*For $50 pupil transportation administrators get advice on business management. Western state directors told to provide more community service with fewer dollars.*

**42** **Feds Say: 'Do As You Please'**
*States will have more flexibility implementing federal safety regulations for school buses.*

**48** **How to Spec and Maintain School Bus Brakes**
*Strategies for controlling costs and improving safety.*

**58** **Tips on Securing Wheelchair Users on Buses**
*Wheelchair tie-downs and occupant restraints pose problems for drivers. New technology and training materials help ease the burden of the tie-down and occupant restraint dilemma.*

**67** **NAPT Goes Country**
*Annual convention at Opryland Hotel in Nashville has expanded workshops, tours through southern history.*

**69** **Legend Forsakes Retirement to Save Tennessee Schools**
*Amid a state funding crisis and hiring freeze, Dr. Farmer launches a one-man crusade to maintain transportation service.*

**71** **Seat Belts Divide Industry**
*Advocates claim seat belts in school buses would reduce injuries and fatalities 20 percent. Opponents say they are costly.*

**76** **School Bus Leasing Is Gaining Momentum**
*Districts get better financing through municipal lease-purchase plans.*

**77** **'The Famous Egg Test'**
*By the late '60s, Charles Adler had a dozen patents to his name. The company he founded now grosses $5 million a year.*

# Departments

Letters to the Editor ..... 4
Industry News ..... 6
NAPT Outlook ..... 18
State Directors' Column ..... 80
New Products ..... 81
Almanac ..... 88
People ..... 89
Calendar ..... 90
Classified Ads ..... 91
Advertisers' Index ..... 93
Publisher's Perspective ..... 94

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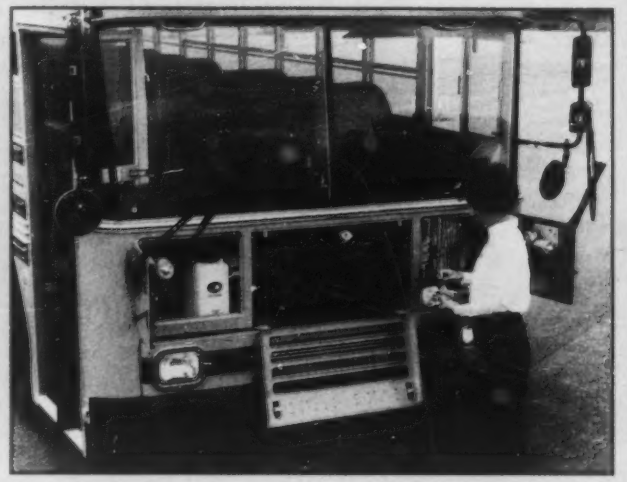
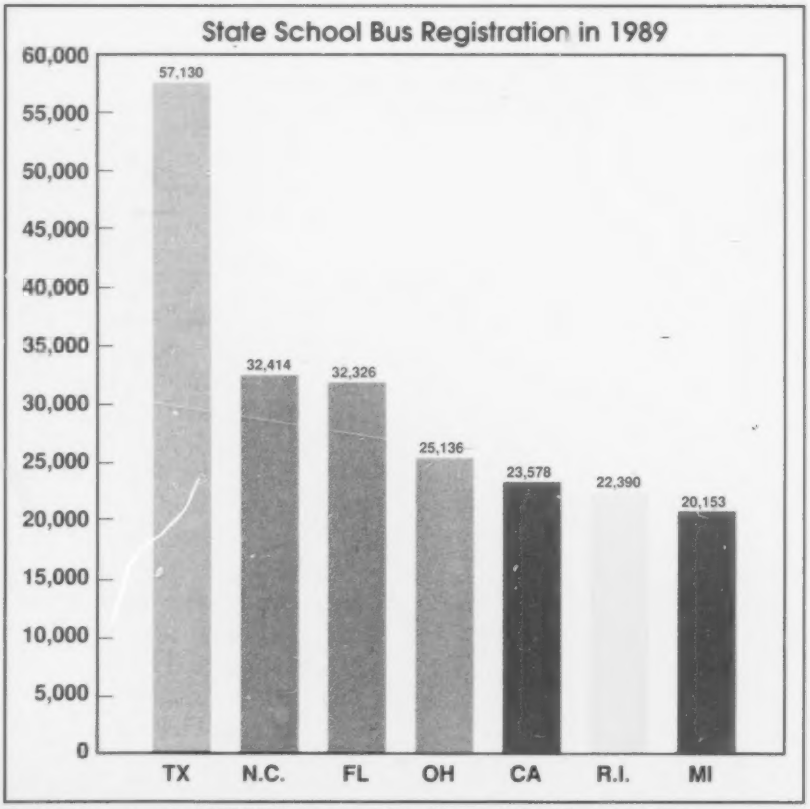
## TC2000 has more passenger seats, improved visibility

Blue Bird Body Co. of Fort Valley, Ga., has redesigned its forward-engine TC2000 increasing passenger capacity to 84 from 78.

The new TC2000 has a windshield 10 percent larger and a lower dash to provide the driver with more visibility. It has 35 percent more glass in the entrance door, giving the driver a better view of the loading zone, and a shorter front and rear overhang.

Service doors in the front of the bus can be unlatched without using tools. Now the driver can more easily check power steering fluid, coolant reservoir and windshield wiper motors.






**Eighty-two percent of 625,040 buses registered in the United States in 1989 were school buses. School bus registrations in seven states exceeded 20,000. SOURCE: Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association of America Inc.**

## Recession pushes contractors into new bus markets

School bus contractors in Ohio are looking to transit and charter buses to help them survive a soft economy.

"I'm noticing, at least in our state, more and more school bus contractors getting into other kinds of busing — transit busing and charter busing," says Norm Murdock, executive director of the Ohio Bus Association in Columbus.

Association members provide charter, transit and school bus services or a combination of the three. "Most of the companies in Ohio do at least two or three kinds of busing," Murdock says. "That's not a new trend for the big boys, but the little boys — the little companies — now they are starting to look at it."

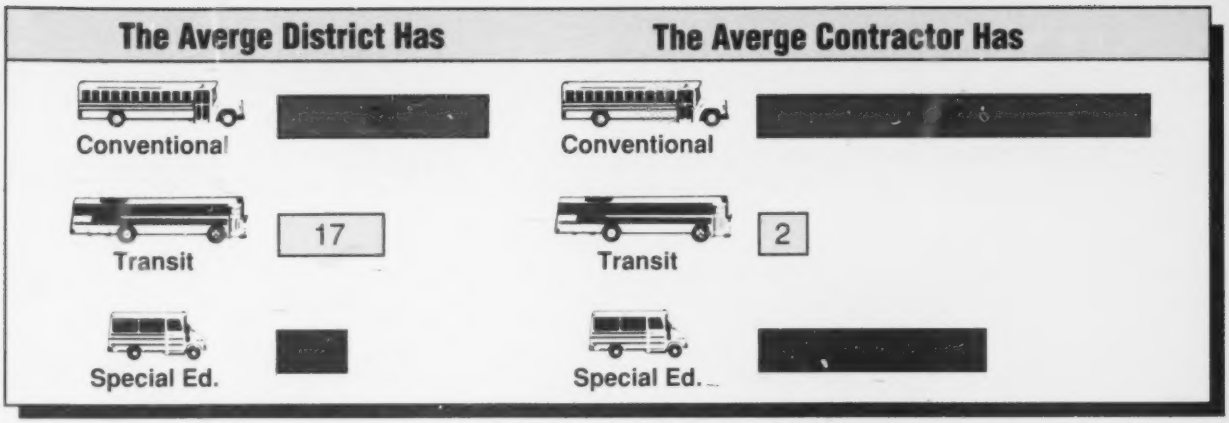
The smaller bus companies are bidding on rural and urban transportation contracts, he says. They are also looking to provide bus repair services for school districts. "They are looking at doing body work for school districts," Murdock says, "or heavy-engine and transmission work."

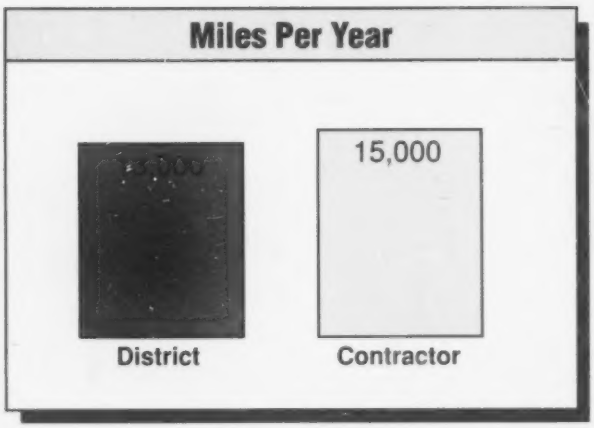
## 5 state director posts are vacant

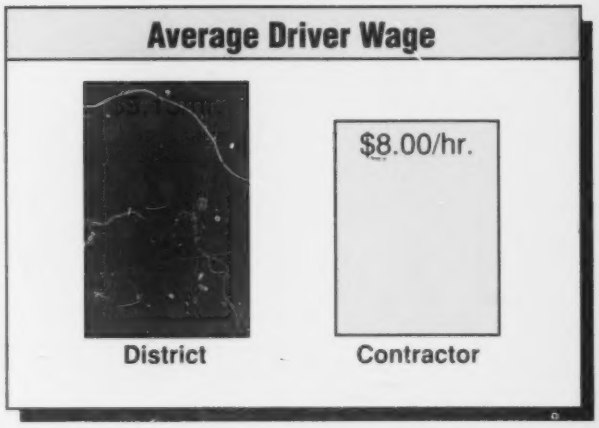
State transportation directors in Maryland, Montana, Utah and West Virginia have either changed jobs or retired.

An effort to reorganize the education department in Texas has left the state director post vacant since the beginning of 1991.

Mike Roscoe, former director of transportation at the Department of Education in Charleston, W.Va., has moved to Frankfort, Ky., to become state director of pupil transportation



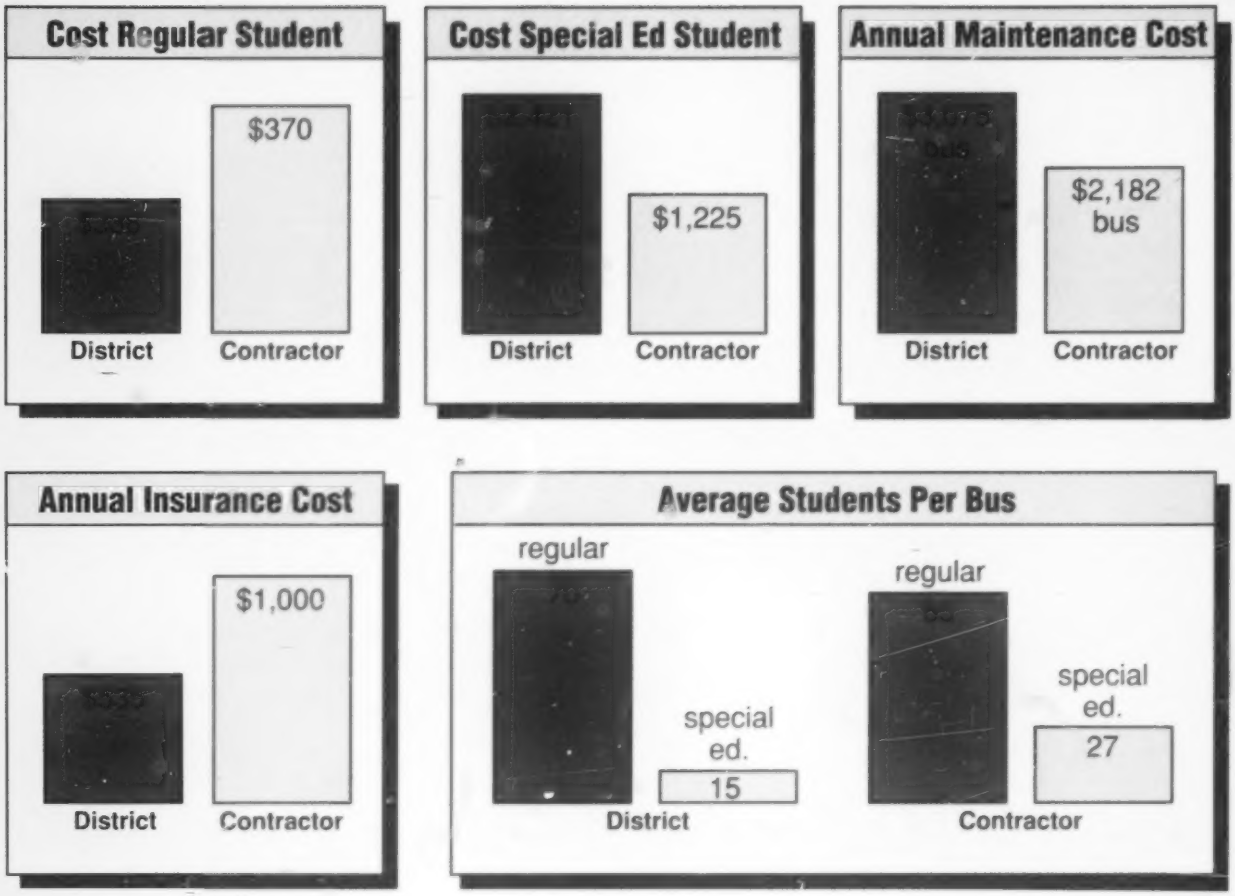

# *SBF* Survey Compares District, Contractor Fleets

School districts' annual bus maintenance averages $3,075 per vehicle. The average contractor plans to purchase five buses and sell two this year.

To provide a new perspective on operating costs in school transportation, *SCHOOL BUS FLEET* magazine recently conducted a survey of district transportation managers and private contractors.

The survey asked 28 questions about vehicle and personnel costs. Responses from districts and contractors were compiled separately and are presented here as averages.

Responses were received from about equal numbers of districts and contractors. The following statistics present a good barometer to measure the differences




and similarities in operating costs between the two.

One caveat in presenting statistics is that the process of gathering such information requires refining. Averages become more realistic after they have been reviewed by readers and compared with other information gathered over a period of time. In some cases, our questions in this first survey may need to be sharpened to get more precise responses in the future.

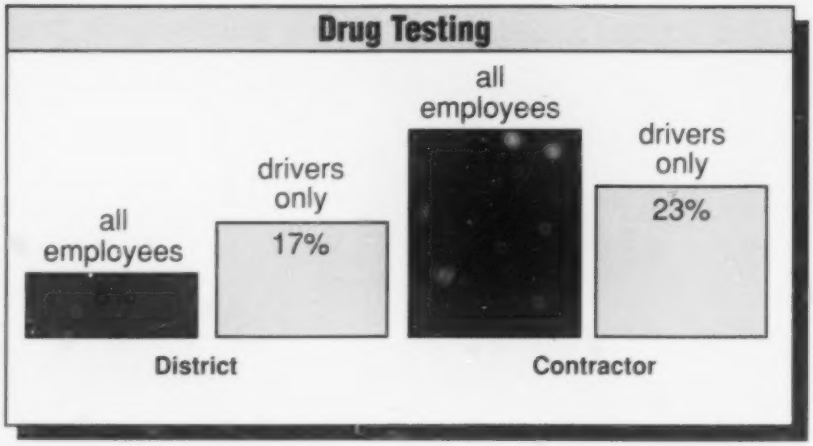
Still, we hope this information is a useful new frame of reference. Please let us know what you think, and plan to respond to our survey next year.

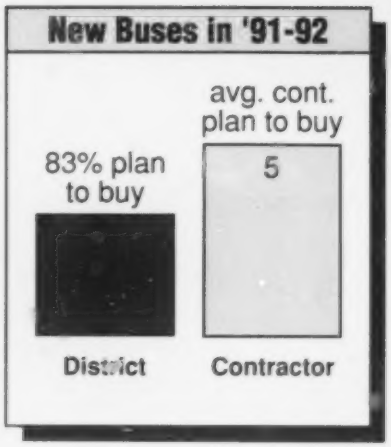
### Average 40 buses

School districts and contractors appear to have fleets very similar in size and composition. Each set of responses average 40 buses per fleet including buses, special education vehicles and multi-purpose vehicles (See accompanying chart for a breakdown of vehicle types.)

In compiling contractor fleet sizes, we omitted responses from the handful of mega-contractors, those with more than 1,000 buses, since they represent a small segment of the industry and would have the effect of making the "average" contractor appear larger than life. All responses were used, however, in figuring every other average in this survey except one, as indicated.

Conventional-style buses are found in nearly every district and contractor fleet. Those buses average five to six years of age. About one-third of all fleets include transit-style buses. Districts that have transit-style buses average 17 per fleet, while contractors who have transit-style buses average about two per fleet. Seventy-five percent of districts operate special ed buses, compared with 69 percent of contractors. Districts that have special ed buses average 13 per fleet, while contractors average 12 per fleet.




**School bus replacement**

Contractors average 15,000 miles annually per vehicle, compared with 13,000 for districts. That may account for the indication that contractors trade in conventional buses after 11 years, compared with 12 years for districts. For districts, the average mileage of a conventional bus at trade-in is 118,000 miles.

Seventy-five percent of districts purchased new buses during 1990-91. For those districts, bus purchases represented about 16 percent of the annual transportation budget. Seventy percent of contractors bought new buses in 1990-91 at an average cost per company of $67,000 (excluding mega-contractors). Contractors with more than 1,000 vehicles averaged more than $10 million in new bus purchases in 1990-91.

Eighty-three percent of districts plan to buy new buses in 1991-92. Each plans to add an average of three buses. More than half of those districts plan to sell as many buses as they buy in the coming year. The "average" contractor will buy five buses and sell two this year.

**Bus operating costs**

Responses were very consistent among large and small districts and contractors in annual cost per regular ed student. Districts, however, pay nearly twice as much to transport special ed students. For school districts, the average cost is $338 per year for regular ed students and $2,421 per year for special ed students. For contractors, the average cost is $370 per year for regular ed students and $1,225 for special ed students.

Districts average 70 students per conventional or transit-style bus in their fleet, and 15 students per special ed or multi-purpose vehicle. Special ed students represent three percent of all passengers for districts.

Contractors average 65 students per conventional or transit-style bus, and 27 students per special ed or multi-purpose vehicle. Special ed students represent four percent of all passengers for contractors.

**Driver wages, CDL**

District school bus drivers earn an average of $9.15 per hour, according to the survey. Contractors pay an average of $8 per hour. There are nearly the same number of men and women drivers.

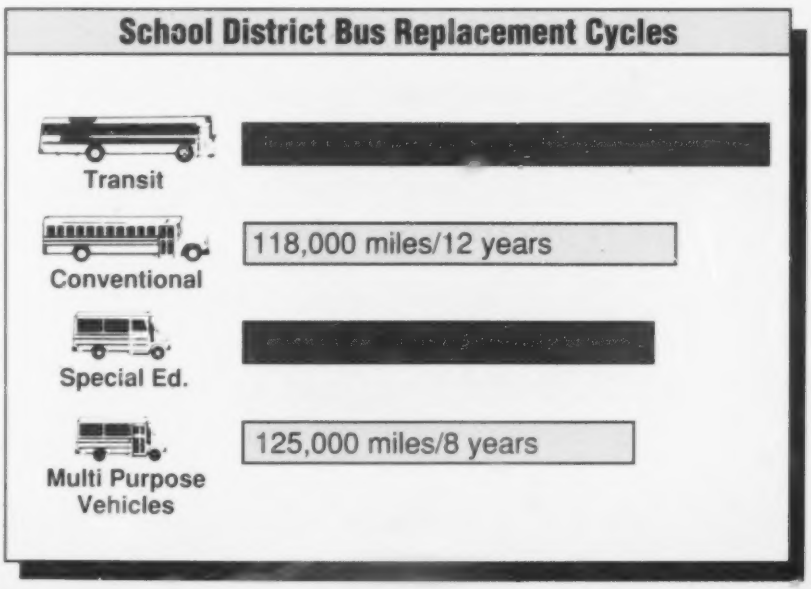
Seventeen percent of districts have a drug testing program for drivers. Eight percent of districts report having a drug testing program for all employees. Twenty-three percent of contractors have a drug testing program for drivers, and 29 percent include all employees in a drug testing program.

Half the districts in the survey pay the cost of having drivers apply for a commercial driver's license. Twenty percent do not pay for CDLs, and the remaining 30 percent split the cost with drivers.

Among contractors, 64 percent do not pay any CDL costs and only 22 percent split the cost with drivers. The average cost of obtaining a CDL is about $50.

**Maintenance costs, brakes**

Annual bus maintenance averages $3,075 per vehicle for school districts,



with responses varying from $850 to $7,000. That compares with an average of $2,182 per year for contractors, whose responses range from $1,000 to $5,000.

Districts enjoy an edge in insurance cost, with an average of $535, compared with $1,000 for contractors.

Gasoline-powered buses are predominant among both districts and contractors. Eighty-three percent of districts have at least some gasoline-powered buses as do 93 percent of contractors. At the same time, diesel buses are found at 66 percent of all districts and 78 percent of contractors.

Half the districts equip buses exclusively with air brakes. Twenty percent use only hydraulic brakes and 30 percent use both. Twenty-eight percent of contractors use only air brakes, while another 28 percent use only hydraulic brakes. Forty-four percent use both.

Stay tuned for next year's results, which will be compared with this year's information to reflect trends in fleet composition, operating costs and management practices.

## 'What is the funniest thing that ever happened on one of your school buses?'

*SCHOOL BUS FLEET* magazine included a question on the survey asking contractors and district managers: "What is the funniest thing that ever happened on one of your school buses?"

The following is a sample of those responses:

- "A bus driver called the dispatcher to report that he had an accident. The dispatcher asked for his location. The driver responded: 'Wait a minute while I crawl under the bus so I can read the street sign.'"
- "A student *forgot* a pet squirrel monkey, and the driver discovered it when it jumped on her back. Fortunately, she was in a parking lot and no accident resulted. So that can now be considered *funny*."
- "We had a goat board a bus along with the students. It was quite a chore to discharge same."
- "Our Gillig bus arrived at the school site, pulled onto the field and sunk to the axles, approximately 200 feet from the parking lot. The first tow truck also sunk, about half way down. The second tow truck almost sunk but eventually pulled the bus and truck out."
- "One of our drivers was always in a hurry. He left a coach at a visiting school. The coach took a lot of ribbing over the incident."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*The WELDON 7000 Electronic Flasher brings field-tested emergency vehicle flasher technology to the school bus. Engineered to deliver maintenance-free performance, the compact, lightweight WELDON 7000 meets all SAE and other applicable standards and is backed by our exclusive limited Three Year Warranty.*

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*For more information on the WELDON 7000, contact Weldon or your local Weldon distributor.*

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